

Donovan Denies Cuba Talks Were Masterminded by U.S.

By JERRY O'LEARY JR.
Star Staff Writer

James B. Donovan, getting his first good rest in three weeks at a cottage in Lake Placid, N. Y., today commented on the Government's role in the release of the 1,113 Cuban invasion prisoners by Fidel Castro.

The New York attorney said press reports crediting the United States Government and Attorney General Robert Kennedy with masterminding the Cuban deal were "absurd."

"I have enormous respect for the Attorney General," Mr. Donovan said in a telephone interview, "but it is absolutely and unqualifiedly so that the policy and negotiations were entrusted to me."

Mr. Donovan is spending Christmas week with his wife and four children and catching up on his rest after three sleepless days in the final stages of the exchange talks in Havana. "I feel," he told this reporter, "like an Adirondack bear hibernating."

Dealt With Drug Firms

He was asked to comment on the role of the Government, and particularly Robert Kennedy in the prisoner exchange.

"We did have the co-operation of the authorities," Mr. Donovan replied, "we could never have succeeded without this."

"But it was not the Government or the Attorney General who was responsible for dealing with the drug companies who supplied what Castro wanted in exchange for the prisoners. I was purely responsible for this."

"The only role the Attorney General played was to assure the drug companies that it would not be in violation of law for them to co-operate with the American Red Cross and the Cuban Families Committee and that the donations would be tax deductible."

Mr. Donovan said, "I physically contacted the heads of two of the largest drug companies. They happen to be old friends of mine. The original plan back in August was that they would handle the entire thing, and they could have done it until the October crisis came up."

"Everything was ready for these two companies to donate when the crisis came up. I stopped everything. I conceived the idea of substituting drugs



JAMES B. DONOVAN

—AP Wirephoto

for the bulky foods the Cubans originally wanted."

Mr. Donovan said that after the crisis ended two members of the Families Committee (Alvaro Sanchez, jr., and Mrs. Berta Barreto de los Heros) went to the Isle of Pines and inspected the prisoners confined there. They returned with bad reports of the Cuban prisoners' physical condition, and Mr. Donovan said it then became a goal to get the prisoners out by Christmas.

"That was three weeks ago," the New York attorney said, "and there wasn't time for just two companies to do the job. There were a thousand and one details to iron out. So I came to Washington and went to the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association, representing more than 200 drug companies. I explained the situation to them."

Troubled by Bursitis

"They agreed to co-operate but required assurances, understandably, that the exchange would be legal as well as in the national interest. The Attorney General did see two representatives of the companies and did give them the assurances they wanted. Mr. Kennedy also reassured them they would not be violating the Logan Act, which prohibits unauthorized discussions with foreign governments and assured them the donations would be tax deductible."

The lawyer, who also negotiated with the American Red Cross, said he was not involved in the case of Soviet spy Rudolf Abel for U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, re-

vealed some of the difficulties he encountered during the protracted negotiations leading to the dramatic release of the prisoners.

He said he had been in great pain from bursitis of the shoulder during the October phase of the negotiations in Cuba.

"There were no oral pain killers in Cuba at that time," he recalled. "I was getting injections every four hours for 2½ days from a Cuban horse trainer over there with something they use on animals. When I got back to Miami, I was running a 102-degree temperature and had an infection in my hip the size of a baseball. The doctor ordered me into a hospital for a week when I got home."

Secrecy Vital

He said he was sorry it was necessary to work in an atmosphere of secrecy in the negotiations with Mr. Castro but that he considered this most important to the success of the mission.

"I didn't even tell the Cuban Families Committee some of what was going on in Havana and they didn't want to know," he said. "If they didn't know they couldn't tell their families and friends something that might have imperiled the release. When it was necessary for me to talk from Havana to my people in Miami, I used only coded messages."

Mr. Donovan said he also wanted to clear up another misapprehension about the last stages of the exchange.

"Castro did not demand that he be permitted to send three inspectors to look at the cargo of the African Pilot," he declared. "I suggested it to strengthen my hand. I felt if they could see for themselves that the stuff was being assembled and loaded, my chances of getting the boys out of Cuba would be enhanced."

His job is not over yet, Mr. Donovan said. There still remains the matter of the 23 Americans in Cuban jails for whose freedom he is negotiating.

The State Department said the American Government was humanitarian, not representing the American Government."

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